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Communicating Cross-Culturally

Towards a New Context for Missions in the Philippines

Edited by

MELBA P. MAGGAY

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The Cover: The Hanunoo text is from the Hanunoo NT, *Ki Mayad Pag Barita* published by O.M.F.; the English translation "The Word became a human being and lived among us" (John 1:14) from TEV; the script is based on samples of Mangyan script found in the works of J. Francisco, Jr., Fr. A. Postma, F. Gardner and I. Maliwanag.

FOREWORD

This book is part of our continuing desire to develop some awareness of the process of perceiving the Bible as text and the task of communicating it in widely varying contexts. It attempts to integrate communication principles into the practice of cross-cultural mission, and hopes to help in the understanding of the tensions generated in the process.

The first part deals with the problem of reading scripture, how culture shapes and conditions it. In these days of so much talk about contextual theology, it is useful to pay attention as well to the *source* of our theological traditions, where they come from and how they came to be what they have become. This usually leads to a shock of recognition, that what confronts us is not a text in need of context, but a text that is as much context because known only through that medium. The religion of a people is always a product of the interaction between the text that one holds sacred and the context one lives. It is useless, for instance, to criticize religions based on formal elements like written texts, be they the Vedas, the Koran or Papal encyclicals. The actual religion of the people is always something else, a strange and an odd mixture of necessity and spirituality, culture and creed. Thus, one finds not only syncretism, but a prosperity gospel, religion as revolution, salvation as an abstract legal fiction or a mere insurance system against the uncertainty of eternity.

Another theme that occupies us in the first section is the more practical problem of how best to communicate, especially to a prescientific culture whose cognitive orientation is roughly the same as that of the pious peasant raised in the icons of

medieval religion. This was in the days when the Reformation had yet to effect the shift from the altar to the pulpit, and Gutenberg's movable press had yet to revolutionize printing and the massive spread of literacy.

The second part features the perspectives of sensitive outsiders who have struggled to be part of this culture. One explores the dimensions of the relationship between missionaries and the national church, with culture as an intervening factor that fouls up signals and creates tension. Another is a first-person account of what it is like to adjust to Filipino culture as a first-term missionary, a helpful signpost to those in the throes of culture shock. The concluding article outlines the options one can take as an ultimate stance: a permanent tourist to whom the host culture is at best a curiosity, an expatriate forever enclosed in a ghetto, creating a little island of his own society in the face of an alien culture, or an incarnate missionary dwelling among us in sensitive solidarity.

There are some raw places in this book likely to cause internal dissonance in some. We have chosen to keep them as a reminder that there is a wound in the body of Christ that needs to be healed if we are to stand together truly as brothers and sisters bound by a tie stronger than culture and a common historical memory.

—MELBA PADILLA MAGGAY
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Finally, to participants of our Cross-Cultural Orientation Seminars who have had to take the contents of this book in the raw—our thanks for your enduring patience and willingness to discover with us the Lord of all cultures.

—MPM

To

Pam Hunt
Miriam Adeney
Rosemary Dowsett
Gracie Dyrness
Alison Goldhor
Eilish Agnew—

friends all and more:

signs to me of the
strength of the Body
of Christ
against barriers of
culture and
the antagonisms of
a wounded history.

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I.

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

by Melba P. Maggay

1

THE TEXT IN CONTEXT: SOME IMPLICATIONS TO COMMUNICATION

The shrinking of the world into a global village with the ensuing traffic among cultures has given rise to an unprecedented dialogue among churches in various parts of the world. Emergent churches from recipient cultures of western missionary movements are struggling for a redefinition of their faith independent of western accretions, while traditionally-sending churches are increasingly conscious of the ethnocentric character of much missionary effort.

Cross-cultural communication, while of fairly recent vintage as a discipline, is a missiological concern as ancient as the day the Gospel broke out of its Jewish wineskins. What seems to be new is the awareness of plurality, both of context and the interpretation of Scriptural text, and a multicultural exchange that is sharpening the specificity of Gospel motifs given the peculiarities of a particular context.

The Text and Context

Central to the issues that have risen out of this exchange is the tension between the text and context, the difficulty of mediating between the supracultural and the incarnational nature of the Christian faith. While we do have a common text which is universally normative, it is a fact that our reading of the text is conditioned by our context. Accounts of genealogies, for instance, have been largely ignored outside of cultures deeply reverent of kinship and ancestral relations. The text without

context is unusable, an abstract proposition that by its very generality does not "come down," while context without the text tends to be a closed system, a windowless world trapped by its own solipsism, unvisited by the fresh burst of insight and energy the Word from outside could give. In the one we fall into the error of a false universalism, assuming that our Gospel formulations are capable of transplantation when they are actually culture-bound. In the other we fall into the error of determinism, allowing the world to set the agenda and consign us to a fairly narrow marketplace of programs and ideas.

Other major issues cluster around certain basic features of many receiving cultures: 1) a belief system that at its base remains unabashedly animist in the face of elegant and more elaborate philosophical systems like Hinduism or Christianity; 2) an experience of colonization with its concomitant political and social distortions; 3) a preliterate, preindustrial cognitive orientation requiring the use of symbol and imagery and a deemphasis on abstract and linear presentations.

The sense of the world as alive and vibrantly personalized by spirits who are agents of nature is right now being recovered, occasioning closer attention to the nature of what Paul calls "principalities and powers" and Jesus' lordship over them. Decolonized countries suffering continued imperialism and poverty are mining anew the prophetic tradition of outrage and bias towards the cause of the poor. Recent identification of the intuitive and analytical centers of the brain and communication theory are opening up preaching to some sensitivity to Scripture's varied perceptual modes and the dominance of right-brained thinking in many of its accounts.

This dialectic between text and context, the understanding that what we know of the Gospel is merely what we have selectively perceived according to the exigencies of our context, is necessary to the process of identifying sharply the biblical motifs that a culture needs. The resulting themes roughly constitute the immediate parameters of our "message" to that context.

But knowing what to tell is only part of the story.

What You See Is What You Get

Gestalt and other theories of perception tell us that what we

say is not exactly what is heard, and what we see is not exactly what is there. The process of communicating involves a lot of "noise," and is subject to skewing according to the universe that the mind of the perceiver inhabits. There is a sense in which, really, "what you see is what you get," that we see only what we have been trained to see.

This means that aside from ideological content, we must pay attention to other dimensions of communication. For example:

a) *Cognitive orientation* — How do people think? Do they think in linear, sequential terms? or in nonlinear, intuitive, image blocks? Are they concrete and relational rather than abstract and analytical in their approach to the environment or the external world in general?

b) *Aesthetic* — Are people attuned to formal, abstract use of space? Or, are they more representational, more given to filling up space with flaming color and detail? Is it a culture of symbol? What is their vocal and tonal quality? Are structures for worship sufficiently respectful of indigenous patterns of space and rhythm?

c) *Time and space* — Is time experienced chronometrically or as an event, a season? Is space an expression of territoriality or of intimacy? How are time and space measured? (In this country, barrio people have been known to approximate distances by saying, "*isang sigarilyo*"— the time it takes to use up a stick of cigarette.) Failure to ascertain people's sense of time and space could occasion offense: in slower cultures, one could be perceived as not only "hurrying" but "hard-driving" or "bullying" or worse, "no time for people"; sitting around to chat with people may seem idling, but to person-centered cultures like the Philippines it comes across as "*ok ito, may pakikisama*" ("he is alright, he is willing to be one of us").

In communicating it is important to understand that images are stronger than words; the nonverbal is a deeper, more intricate and more extensive language than the verbal. When a missionary comes to a barrio he is not only bringing with him a set of propositions, but the artifacts of his culture: the tools (a Land Rover or a motorbike, a loudspeaker or a washing machine), the life-

style ("oh, look, he can not eat with his hands"; "why do most of them live in plush villages?") also speak, and may disrupt or enrich a people's way of life, e.g., the advent of literacy as a result of the introduction of the Word.

Attention on both the "text" and the "context" in which communication takes place is the concern of this book, meant merely as a primer on the difficult task of speaking accurately to the needs of this culture.

2

READING, OR HOW TO GET THE SEVEN BLIND MEN SEE THE ELEPHANT

Let us imagine a deathbed scene.

A great man is dying, his wife clutches his hand and leans over him, a doctor is by his side taking his pulse. Standing in solemn silence are a reporter and an artist. The former is there to report the event, the latter happened to be visiting.

Now let us imagine what each would see.

The wife, because she is so much a part of him, would perhaps see very little. Very likely her whole being would be intent on watching breathlessly every spasm, every twitch of pain. Her frantic anxiety would allow her to see nothing else.

The doctor would have an eye for more clinical details. He would carefully keep an eye on the heartbeat, take the temperature and go through the futile motions of fighting to the teeth the sure lot of the dying.

The reporter would perhaps take a wider sweep, a more panoramic glance at the scene. It is most likely he would pay attention to the wildness of the woman's grief, the blank, bewildered helplessness in the doctor's eyes. He would size up the room, compare its lofty vastness and decadent richness with the shrunken old man huddled under the sheets. He may even notice the fly on the medicine bottle, all the details that make up the tragic inner meaning of the event.

The artist, on the other hand, may be looking at something else: the shadows underneath the bushy eyebrows, the pale, bluish twilight behind the shimmering curtains, the deep purple and fine texture of the heavy chairs. The lines in the woman's suffering face, the disorder of her hair, may interest him more

than the slow tally of the grand seigneur's dying gasps.

Now it is obvious from this exercise that we may be looking at the same thing and yet see it in many different ways. What we see depends largely on what we are disposed to see; and what is seen is but a corner of the reality that is there. In communication we call this *selective perception*, meaning not so much the wicked propensity of some of us to edit anything unpleasant or threatening from view as the natural phenomenon of missing out on that which does not interest us.

The implications to our reading of the Scriptures are clear.

None of us see the Absolute Reality that is recorded in it in all its pregnant fullness. What we see is but a small part, and even that is seen darkly, wrested from the multitude of competing images that press upon us every day. None of us see it unengaged, on top of a hill as it were, looking down the dust and rattle of passing caravans. We are all on the journey, all blind men fumbling for the right steps to take as we participate in the life of the world. What we see is a reflection of what we are, and where we are in the struggle to make sense of the hope that is in us in a world of want and despair and fear.

It is not an accident that one hits upon the awful glory of the gift of choice, and yet another gets struck by the sovereign power of God to choose His little ones and make them bow the knee. "*Sola fide, sola gratia*" becomes someone's war cry, the deadly assurances of faith without works incites someone else into fear and trembling. Each cuts a corner of the Truth for himself, and well it serves him.

It is also not surprising that liberation theology should dominate much of the Third-World thinking, or that the complex of ideas surrounding sin and guilt should appeal so much to the conscience of the West. In poorer countries, the need for concrete engagement in the face of the intense questioning brought about by the situation of the poor has made the cosmic dimensions of the Gospel stand out far more sharply, almost leaping out of every page of Scriptures. In affluent countries, more subtle oppressions like angst and guilt neuroses have brought about an emphasis on the inward certainties ringingly proclaimed by the Word. These examples are highly generalized, but they do demonstrate how the specifics of a culture, e.g., whether rich or poor, preindustrial or technologically sophisticated, animist or theologically elaborate, determine people's

sensitivities and leanings.

Literature has an ancient word for it: "point of view," the vantage point from which we dare to read and tell His story. There are as many ways of reading Scriptures as there are points of view. This is what we mean when we say that there are many theologies. There is of course one Theology, the knowledge of God as originally recorded. There is a common text by which theological systems are to be measured and judged. But we must also say that none of us can claim for our statements about it a final and exhaustive character. To do so would be to fall into the error of the seven blind men who tried to guess the elephant.

What is happening in theology is a bit like the seven blind men who generalized out of their limited experience what the whole elephant must be. One took hold of the body and thought it was a wall, another got hold of the massive leg and thought it was a tree trunk, another happened to feel the length and pointed sharpness of the tusk and thought it was a sword. Each was right in his perception of what each part was like. But all were wrong in supposing that the part they chanced upon was all there was to the elephant.

And so with our theologies. How many dishonoring divisions could have been avoided if people had enough humility to see that theirs was but one reading of a very rich and very vast literature? Would missionaries be so eager to dump on us their systematics and pet formulations if they realize that what they have is but a dim version of a part of the Word, or worse, that it is not the part the Spirit can best use in speaking to this culture?

This is not to say that the insights of one culture are of no value whatever to another. Certainly, we must listen to each other and profit richly from the truths each culture discovers. But we must remember that God draws people to Himself through the things that are most natural and familiar to them. The Magi came to the Christchild by the Star of Bethlehem. To David He was a shepherd, to the hungry crowds He was the bread of life, to the Samaritan woman's searching thirst He was the water that flows forever and always.

This is the reason behind the plea to take cultures a little bit more into account in our reading of the Scriptures. God's revelation has a cultural specificity that we shall do well to imitate.

He did not simply say to the Jews that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. He instituted the Passover feast

and an eleborate sacrificial system so as to make it possible for them to find within their culture the meaning of the Lamb's dying. Those of us who are threatened by recent talks about the cultural conditionedness of the Scriptures should remember that if we take away the Jewish cultural baggage behind the events at Golgotha we are left with nothing but the ignominious hanging of an obscure rabble-rouser who pretended to lay claims on the ruined throne of an ancient Jewish king.

Events themselves do not mean much. A lot of fuss is made about the historicity of the events surrounding Jesus. Oh sure it did happen, but so did the latest newspaper item. To say that it occurred in history is about as significant as saying that the murder of a pop singer really did happen recently. To establish it as a fact is one thing, to make it known as a truth that truly sets free is another. For this we have to go back to the tradition in which it took place.

It seems to us that when we speak of a Gospel "core," we really mean the Christ events. These are of course universally shareable, for the plot of Scriptures is simple enough: man fell and so God took a people to Himself, out of whom came the promised Saviour who died and rose again and is to return in glory at the end of time. Anybody who knows how to read will see this. In fact all of Christendom already knows this. We have Christmas and Holy Week and Easter to prove it. Yet we know very well that people really do not know the meaning of these events. It is this problem of meaning which makes cross-cultural communication intensely difficult.

The situation is a bit like reading a novel. It is easy to recount the bare bones of a plot. I suppose Tolstoy would not get offended if someone ventures to say that *War and Peace* is the story of how Natasha finally married Pierre interspersed with a blow-by-blow account of the Napoleonic wars. It is also fair enough to say that *Crime and Punishment* is about a gifted but impoverished student who kills a miserly old hag to give himself a chance to cultivate his immense gifts. The question, "What happens next?" is easy enough to outline. But when the hardnosed "So?" is thrown at us, we get stumped and we hie off to our study corners to clarify to ourselves what it is really that makes Tolstoy's book larger than a love story, or Dostoyevsky's more than a detective story. Once we get to this point, it is every man's guess from then on.

It is characteristic of all great literature that while it is possible to have some agreement as to the outline of the plot, there is always a variety of interpretations fiercely fought for. Each reading is usually organized around some insight that has especially gripped the reader.

So with the Scriptures. While it would be possible to make a summary that every one with a relatively developed sense of fact could agree upon, the themes are so densely rich that it would be violence to presume that one man or one culture or one age can colonize the wild vastness of its meanings.

Now much of our difficulty in communicating the Gospel today has to do with being able to put across some relevant content to the Gospel events that already saturate the imagination of many cultures. In this culture at least, the task of communicating is way past the stage of making known the Gospel plot. The last thing we need is another outline that conceivably can be passed on from culture to culture but by its very level of generality does not interact with this culture at the point where it hurts. It is a principle in communication that the higher the level of generalization, the more abstract and the less usable a statement is for a specific situation. This is perhaps the reason why the eternal Word was not afraid to become a Jew. In belonging to a specific ethnic grouping, He was not being less than a man for all races and all seasons. He was simply seeing to it that the fact of God should be something that people can touch and see and handle.

The concern that God should not simply be a name, a dream or a faraway longing is behind the insistence that all cultures be allowed to read with their own eyes the specific meaning of the cross for themselves. This is something a missionary will find hard to do, or at least will take time to be able to do. Listening to the culture is essential, and this takes time, and necessarily means that for a while the missionary is hardly functional, a fact that is perhaps hard to take for those who come from cultures that are impatient and aggressively efficient. But it must be remembered that one does not come here as a multinational does, with loads of money and resources and promising to effect technology transfer (notice all the recent talks about nationalization and training leaders). One comes here as a servant. And servanthood means that one must be prepared to wait. Jesus was willing enough to start as a helpless child, spending thirty years of His life just growing up and taking root among His people. He wasn't

overeager to get out there and preach.

The reality of the body of Christ and the ability of the Spirit to speak through each one should humble those of us who belong to established theological traditions. The Word is so untidily deep that it defies our itch to colonize it into some neat formulation. There is still so much to be mined, and the Spirit is still speaking to the rest of the churches.

We often forget that Revelation itself was an unfolding. It took centuries before we could get an adequate picture of who God is and what, darkly, He could be up to in human history. We now have the complete text, but we still do not have a full view of the drama. That will have to wait until all of the Church gets to recite its lines and the curtain falls and the houselights come up. Then we shall see the elephant, and, hopefully, understand, even as all of us have been fully understood.

3

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

A. Paul's Speech at Areopagus

So Paul, standing in the middle of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring." Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in his righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." Now when they

heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (Acts 17:22-34, RSV)

Paul standing in the middle of the Areopagus had a tough audience. These were people who spent all their time telling or hearing something new (v. 21m), inured to all kinds of intellectual cheap-jacks retailing scraps of second-hand philosophy (v. 18). The court was an ancient institution, examining and licensing public lectures.

The speech started innocuously enough: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious . . ." (v. 22). The violent grip of anguish over the city's litter of idols (v.16) is here subdued into a graciously formal fact: behind the shrines in every corner, underneath the philosophic polish, is a deep religious longing and a fear of losing count of the gods (v. 23). There has to be a shrine even for the "unknown god," and it is this that gives Paul his entry: "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. . . ."

Gently, he introduces a new idea: "The God who made the world and everything in it . . . does not live in shrines made by man," but then he is quick to add something not quite new to the Epicureans: "nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything," nor to the Stoics: "since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything" (v. 25). This combination of the strange and the familiar is a pattern repeated in verses 26-28. Paul jolts Athenian pride by slashing through the myth of their having sprung spontaneously from Attic soil and stressing their commonality with the rest of mankind (v. 26). Dimly, in the splendid isolation of a forgotten diaspora, they are to seek for God and feel after him (v. 27). Yet this God who is the unknown cause of our pining is not far, for "In him we live and move and have our being," we are sons and creatures bound up with his life (v. 28). Again, the quotes from local poets echo the familiar and somewhat balance the dissonant note of verse 26.

Verses 29 to 31 is a series of ideas of increasing strangeness. In a culture where the gods form the subject of some of its finest pieces of representational art, Paul speaks of a deity that could

not be captured in gold or silver or stone. More irregularly, he speaks of all of that as belonging to a time of ignorance, a dimness that God has been prepared to overlook. He then picks up the theme of universal accountability by speaking of a day of judgment before a man whom God has appointed, whose right to it is made sure by his resurrection from the dead.

Mention of the resurrection disrupts the speech. The people could no longer hear, used as they are to the tidy idea of an immortality of the soul, and the bleak symmetry of Aeschylus' despair: "But when the earth has drunk up a man's blood, once he is dead there is no resurrection . . ."

From this text we observe a number of communication principles:

1. *Establish a point of contact.*

In stumbling upon the "unknown god," Paul finds his opportunity to speak of the universal God of creation.

2. *Proceed from the familiar to the unfamiliar.*

From the immanent God Paul speaks of the transcendent and finally of the untidy notion of a bodily resurrection.

3. *Move from affirmation to judgment.*

a) Notice that Paul does not say that the Athenians are idolatrous but instead faintly approves of them as "religious"; the multitude of idols express a longing deeper than pagan fear. The hard sayings, e.g., Athen's commonality of origin and guilt with the rest of mankind, are counterbalanced by easily digestible and incontrovertible facts.

b) We have no right to judge a culture until we have fully understood what is behind apparently outrageous features; all cultures have a logic of their own. There will always be things about a culture that we can affirm and things that we must judge, but the pattern is affirmation before judgment.

c) The theory of dissonance in communication tells us that messages that are too negative create in the receiver such internal disturbance that he is likely to seek information that will reinforce his position; too much and premature negativism is counterproductive. This means, for instance, that it is poor communication to right away major on Mary and the saints in speaking to Catholics in this culture as these constitute the very core of what religion means to them. To be critical of such veneration is to take away a lifeline they will most certainly fight tooth and

nail for unless and until the Lordship of Jesus has become a reality in their lives.

This passage is a good example of what has been called "concept fulfillment," the process of bringing every thought captive to Jesus as the final fulfillment of what men have only darkly understood.

The hungering and thirsting which expresses itself in a multiplicity of idols finds satisfaction in the "unknown god" who is transcendent and yet very near.

B. The Sower's Story

Long ago, a strange white man came to these shores. He was tall and shone like the sun and had a great many bright things about him. The people looked in awe at him. They wanted to touch his golden hair, to feel the eyes that almost looked like the color of the sky.

So many whispers were exchanged under the shade of the trees. The man is strange, it was said. He could not live in the flat land as the rest of the village. He liked the thinner air up the hill, where he had a great big house full of things that shone and blinked and roared. The women washing clothes at the river were full of talk about the water that came and flowed at his bidding. He had things that were capable of many wonders.

Also he would not talk, or at least not the way the Flatlanders usually did. The Flatlanders loved to talk about their cattle and their babies. At sundown they liked to sit in the twilight and watch their children play and kick the dust under their feet. But the man would not sit with them. He always seemed to be doing something or going somewhere. Maybe he is shy, they said, or maybe he is thinking of the words he would say to us. The man had many words about far-off things.

The words sounded deep and good. The man was earnest and spoke with feeling. But the people would lower their heads and scratch their toes upon the earth. They were shy of the words, for the people were not used to putting words to deep things. When there was hurt inside, something big and red and swollen in the heart, there was only sadness in their eyes and piercing, haunting songs sang far into the night. When a woman was big

with child, when the fields ripened and the rain drenched the earth, they would stop and stand in silence and simply, reverently watch. For these they had no words, no names for the gentle ache that came when the sun died, or for the fearful hush that descended upon them when at night they killed a white cock, there on the hill, naked and pale in the light of the moon.

The people were used to doing things that had no words. Once a year they would go to the river. The elders would go first, wading deep into the water until it was up to their shoulders. They would all stand still, waiting for the headman to raise the image of their god to the sky and then let it fall to be carried by the water downstream. Motionless, the people would watch as the image rose again and floated towards the other side of the river. It was said that if the image failed to rise again there was no cleansing for the people. The people would then bow their heads and silently weep.

The white man tried his best to keep the people from going to the river. He spoke of how someone else died so that they need not go to the river. The people would smile and nod their heads at him. But each year they would all go down to the river again.

They had no way of telling him that something happened when the water covered them, or when the image was raised and they watched it burn in the blinding light of the sun. It was the same when at night they drove away their fears by killing a white cock. When blood streaked the whiteness of its breast and the legs kicked violently, the mournful voices under the earth seemed to grow still, and the spirits among the rocks and the trees seemed to cease their wanderings.

The man was sad that the people seemed to have stony hearts. Many times he taught them words to think about when fears haunt then. But the people would forget, and the words that remained they would use for casting spells and calling on the powers to heal a baby that was sick.

The people were also sad and grew shy of him. They had thought the gods were with him and he could bring healing to the barrenness of their land. But the man did not seem interested in calling on his gods for things like that. He mostly talked, saying many fine words that sometimes touched the people. The old men shook their heads. The man has no power in him, they would say. Else he would know how to call on his

by friendly greetings dating back to Liberation and MacArthur's return: "Hi, Joe! Victory, Joe!" But all of this is deceiving. The Filipino is as hard to penetrate as any poker-faced Asian. It is possible to live here for thirty years without really knowing the people.

The lack of dissonance, of discomfort in many who are happily ensconced in their missionary ghettos, is perhaps due precisely to the failure to get deeper into the culture. There is no culture shock because there is no real culture contact, no deep relationships forged with nationals who could not be patronized or are in fact capable of better than equal footing.

It is cause for concern that there is a very wide gap between the life-style of many missionaries here and that of the people they serve. We are often told that already, just by coming here, a drop in life-style has been suffered. While we recognize that some may of course be relatively poorer than they were in a more affluent setting the standards by which they live here have for the culture the internal meaning of "rich, distant, *walang pakiki-isa*"; or, to the more political, perhaps CIA.

It is worth noting that when Jesus came down He took upon himself not His standards but ours. Becoming a man was in itself a drop in stature of cosmic proportions; he could have elected to be born privileged and it still would be an act of great humility and sacrifice, but he did not. He chose to be poor even by human standards, to dwell among a people harried and begrimed by daily toil.

3. *Practice biblical relativism.*

Much of the tension, as well as humor, of cross-cultural mishaps have to do with the inability to read and get deeper into the signs, the symbolic language, of a given culture. It is not enough to know the language; one must enter the silent, wordless world of meaning that a people inhabit if one is not to transliterate and lapse into cultural imperialism.

Example 1. A freshman missionary in Mindoro was quite passionately importuning a congregation to be born again: "*Kailangan kayong manganak na muli.*" To his chagrin the faces of the elderly ladies dropped. There was a general air of despair. He found out later that *manganak* is to "give birth," when what he really wanted to say was *ipanganak.*

Command of the language is always directly proportional to knowledge of context. Even a deceptively easy and adaptable language like Filipino gets harder without sufficient grasp of which prefixes to use in which context. Also, English is, strictly speaking, no longer English in this culture; words like *hostess*, *salvage*, have acquired different connotations or even meaning (e.g., "hostess" is a hospitality girl in a bar while "salvage" is a type of murder invented during the Marcos regime that usually has protesters as victims, and features gagging, decapitation, throwing a person's body in a ditch and other savage acts).

Example 2. A group of Filipinos were invited to the home of a missionary. When asked to sit down some took out their handkerchiefs, spread them on their seats and sat on them. Before the meal, they all proceeded to wipe their plates and spoons and forks with the paper napkin furnished them. The lady of the house felt a bit uncomfortable that they found her standard of housekeeping and hygiene not quite up to par.

Gestures or body language are commonly thought to be universal. Not quite. They may have different meanings depending on context. Nonverbal behavior such as that of the above is, among Filipinos, merely an innocuous habit carried over from having to live with so much dust and substandard sanitation in public eating places.

Nonverbal cues are perhaps the hardest to learn, and the easiest to misinterpret: holding hands between people of the same sex here does not carry the same homosexual connotations it has in much of the West; a wink is very naughty, while we think nothing of moving our eyebrows up and down to signify approval or a greeting, a terribly suggestive gesture in a place like England.

Example 3. A missionary invites a Filipino student to a meeting. The student flashes a smile and says "*Sige, titingnan ko*" ("Okay, I'll see if I can"). He does not come.

Later, he drops in while the missionary is having a meal. He is asked if he has eaten. He scratches his head, looks at the floor and says, "*Busog ako*" ("I'm full"). The missionary continues eating and the student leaves, feeling his new friend has been a little ungracious. The missionary thinks

he must speak to him sometime about integrity and letting his yes be yes.

Notice that there is an obvious failure to enter into the meaning of the student's signals. To an insider in the culture the plain meaning of his smile is that he will not come but he is too *nahihiya* (ashamed) to say no outrightly. The shuffling and the head-scratching and the declaration that "I am full" are all an indirect and roundabout way of politely saying, "No, I haven't eaten but you need not trouble yourself much for I am really only a little hungry."

There is no subterfuge here; only another language not accessible to the outsider. One must be careful not to make a moral issue out of what is really a difference in communication systems.

The inability to distinguish culture-bound norms, in this case the direct and straightforward style of intercourse in much of the West, from absolute biblical principles, i.e., letting your yes be yes and your no, no—has been responsible for many tragic mistakes in the history of missionary movements.

4. *As much as possible, avoid the following stereotypes:*
   a) *The Godfather*
   The missionary as a backslapping, bouyant and benign presence not unlike the old *padrino* (godfather or sponsor) of feudal times, about as generous and autocratic, dispensing favors out of some inexhaustible source to wondering converts malleable and susceptible enough to feel an eternal *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude).
   b) *The Bull-in-the-China-Shop*
   Driven and hulking, a rugged cowboy straight from the land of the pioneer, the missionary comes crashing down the delicate balance of SIR in a church or an office, says all the wrong things even when he means well, for he has great faith in the verbal and does not understand why the natives seem to lack aggressiveness: they do not speak up and have nothing much to say.
   c) *The Trying-Hard*
   With his usual thoroughness and belief in the importance of being earnest, the missionary dutifully reads all the cross-cultural manuals at hand and is now out there trying

out his Tagalog and eating *balut* (boiled, fertilized duck egg) with a grim resolution and eagerness quite painful to behold.

d) *The Reluctant Hero*

Having been repeatedly told in mission conferences that he is God's gift to Asia, the missionary comes to these shores burning with visions of educating the natives in the way of God. However, being sufficiently sensitive, he soon finds the error of his assumptions, and with horror comes to realize that there is really not much to contribute and vastly more to learn. He gets depressed, becomes more and more apologetic, packs his bags and goes home feeling disillusioned and a failure.

Finally, brethren, some encouraging words:

While we say, "Let there be no patronizing, no more domination," we also say, "We embrace you as brothers and sisters and receive you as gifts from the hand of Him who has sent you. Together we shall work and together we shall learn, and if by chance you wound us we shall love and cover it with the blood that bought us."

So let there be no fear. Serve in freedom and sensitivity. If by chance you stumble on the way pick yourself up and have a few good laughs. That is our way.

II.

THE MISSIONARIES: TALES FROM THE UNDERSIDE OF FILIPINO CULTURE

5

CULTURE, MISSIONARIES AND THE NATIONAL CHURCH

William A. Dyrness

It is easy to exaggerate the problems that exist between missionaries and the national church. Some, like James Michener in his novel *Hawaii*, seem to take special delight in such differences, and have exploited them for great fun and profit. Nevertheless, on the assumption that we can always do better than we are, we may admit that we sometimes do not understand one another. Moreover, it is sometimes the case, though certainly not always, that these differences result from our different cultural values. So it may be that some reflection on the nature of culture will pay dividends.

For many of us—we might as well admit it—culture is little more than geography. Where you live in the world doesn't really matter much in the end, especially when you become a Christian. For when you are in Christ, the New Testament seems to say, there is neither Jew nor Greek. That is, when we become Christians we no longer consider our cultural differences important. In fact, the truth is we sometimes feel we should try to efface our cultural differences, or, what is worse, some other culture that we secretly admire. If this is true—and there seems biblical support for it—then it doesn't really matter where we serve Christ as long as there is need.

And it doesn't really matter what methods we use as long as we speak the local language and use local illustrations. On this view it is easy to conclude, "Doesn't God love us all the same way and want to give us abundant life"? We might as well take

our number and join the crowd in front of the American Embassy. There is no reason why foreign missionaries should not keep coming as they always have to plant churches and do evangelism. Anyway they have the money.

But there is a growing recognition that the matter is not so simple. For many Filipinos indigenous values are becoming very important. They realize that their very identity depends on their "roots" and so their unique history and heritage give them a sense of dignity and importance. No doubt there are some who take this line of thinking to extreme. These radicals may insist that Christianity be made to conform to the values of their people and its past. Even God, they insist, would not ask them to violate the integrity of their traditions which have grown through heroic millennia. Even if we deny these radical conclusions, most of us agree that there is something valuable about this rising sense of dignity and historical rootedness. But doesn't the Bible belittle these things? Doesn't this risk making elements of culture more important than the Bible?

How do we retain the obvious truth that both these points of view represent? When the full biblical materials are in view, it becomes obvious that both positions have something to learn. The first, those that equate culture with geography, have failed to see how all pervasive a person's culture is. You can take a peasant out of the province, but you cannot take the province out of the peasant. For culture is the sum total of customs and productions of a people who live together. It includes not only language and foods, but all the habits and values that make us what we are. Now we can no more avoid expressing all these than we can jump out of our skin. It follows us like a shadow, even, or perhaps we can say especially, when we do not notice. For the Christians two things are at stake here. The first is made clear in the Genesis account of creation. There we learn that God created us to live together in communities and tend the earth together in what we now call a culture. There is nothing shameful about this; it is clearly part of God's design. We were created to speak, sing and hammer out our lives embedded in the stuff of God's good creation. It is true that man sinned and thus community has become a challenge and not only a delight; we will have something to say about this below. But the second point at stake in an underestimate of culture is that Christ did not come to take us out of our culture, but to transform—to redeem—our

lives and thus the shape (culture) of our lives. If you study carefully Paul's statement (from Gal. 3:28) that we quoted above, you will see that what is done away with is not cultural differences (do we stop being male and female?), but the barriers that these differences erect to fellowship in Christ. Paul after all continued to keep the law, even while he recognized and rejoiced that Christ had taken down the middle wall separating Jews and Gentiles and made them one people (though not one culture) (Ephesians 2:14).

But we must admit the dangers of evaluating our culture too highly. Here the disciplines which have helped us appreciate the importance of culture, the social sciences, can provide help. For while these recognize the integrity and unity of each cultural system, and the dangers of judging one cultural system by another, they also recognize the possibility, even the necessity of social changes and transformation. As Peter Berger warns us, we may recognize the all-pervading character of culture and the fact that our perspective is limited by our communities and their traditions. We may understand the importance of culture; there is no reason whatsoever to stand in awe of it. To those who would overemphasize their culture, the Christians would insist on two things. First, there is the fact of sin. The Bible is consistent in its testimony that sin has invaded every corner of our individual and social lives, that means into all culture (and all of culture). Though the basic goodness and fruitfulness of creation is preserved and God's common grace insures that every culture retains a basic integrity, our sinful character guarantees all the values we inherit are dirtied and distorted. Every object and gestures of our lives can be used in our greedy pursuit of self-interest. But, secondly, Christians also believe that God as Creator and Redeemer stands over all cultures and by His word judges (as well as redeems) every culture. So it is the word of God and not missionaries (and certainly not their culture) that stands in judgment over sinful habits and customs.

Thus, insisting on the importance of culture is not riding a hobby horse. It is simply recognizing the limitations (and the delights!) into which we have been born. Moreover it is in this context that God calls us to minister. While a ministry abroad may be more glorious, it is not more essential. Our neighbors, our family, our work and schoolmates have the first claim on our Christian calling by virtue of the place God has put us in. We are

to take root and bear fruit in the place where God has planted us, appreciating and utilizing all that's good in our heritage, even as we repudiate what is evil.

The reason this is important is that we all have our part to play in the body of Christ. God wishes our particular flower to bloom in His new creation and unless we learn our part well, there will be some part missing in the great heavenly choir John speaks of in Revelation 7:9-11. We needed missionaries to plant the seed; perhaps we still need them to tend the plants. But the missionaries will never sing your song and give your floral radiance. For what God wants on these islands is a Filipino Church, strong and healthy, bearing fruit and rooted deeply in its own native soil, having grown up to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

By chance I heard two reports recently. One was by a mission leader in the Philippines. He stressed that we need many more missionaries to come from abroad and plant the Church in the Philippines. He urged everyone to pray that God would raise up this host of Christian workers. The second report was by a leader in the national Church. He projected that in ten years only specialized missionaries would be allowed into the country and that evangelism and church planting would have to be done by Filipinos. Missionaries are needed, he stressed, especially in areas where we do not yet have trained Filipinos. I wonder how often these two leaders talk to each other. I wonder if we understand the cultural issues that are involved. To encourage such dialogue and such understanding must be our concern nowadays.

6

YANKEE IN BATANGAS: REFLECTIONS OF AN AMERICAN MISSIONARY

Karen Druliner Lampinen

No one warned me that coming as a missionary to the Philippines would help me understand how it feels to be a giraffe in the zoo. Being stared at wasn't a problem in Metro Manila, but twenty-four hours after arrival we were on a bus bound for Batangas City, where the only light-skinned, long-nosed residents were the missionaries. After a time one's senses become slightly numbed to the stares, but at first every turned head and incredulous gaze was noted with distinct discomfort.

Being asked to share some of the problems and pressures encountered by missionaries when they come to work in the Philippines could suggest that coming here is a difficult, negative experience. So let me set the record straight by emphasizing that I consider it a tremendous privilege to have been here for the last four years and look forward to spending many more happy and enriching years in this fascinating country. As missionaries we have come at the call of God, out of obedience to Him, expecting to make adjustments to new and different ways of living, thinking, and acting. Our desire is to be accepted and inconspicuous, but this doesn't happen overnight. I doubt that any of us realizes ahead of time just how many changes are in store for us or how long the adaptation process will take. No matter how many lectures we have heard and articles we have read, there is no magic formula for instant adaptation. This highlights our need for understanding Filipino friends and co-workers and calls forth gratitude for all those who have loved and accepted me when my

actions have been objectionable and my attitudes most un-Filipino. Now I can laugh and write about some of my struggles because of the loving help I have been given in learning to grow and change.

It is hard to pinpoint how many days, weeks, or months go into each phase of adjustment to life here in the Philippines but I think there are at least three stages which we all go through. In the initial phase we react most strongly to our physical surroundings.

Because I arrived in Batangas early in June, just before rainy season began, I reacted first to the almost unbearable heat and inescapable dust and dryness that went with it. Living in the middle of town meant being surrounded by people, animals and traffic. Consequently on my first night in Batangas I was kept awake by radios blaring, cars honking, frogs croaking, mosquitos buzzing, cocks crowing, and dogs barking! (It is amazing how deaf I am to all of these sounds now!) Insect life was frightening too and many times I retreated to the security of my mosquito net, the only place I felt safe from *butikis*, cockroaches and other unfamiliar creatures.

Phase two may last for a few months or a few years, but the best word to describe it is a time of CONFUSION over differences we just don't understand: differences in living standards, health standards, cultural cues, and language.

Standard of living. By Midwestern American standards my family certainly wasn't at all well-to-do. We drove the same car for twelve years, couldn't afford fancy vacations, enjoyed hamburger rather than steak and grew our own vegetables. But here people treat me as a rich American. Am I? It's an uncomfortable question to face for the first time. Another problem for us is being accosted by people asking for money. Since my spending money comes from the sacrificial gifts of fellow Christians, how much is it right for me to give away?

Then there is the awkwardness of having a *katulong.* I don't think anyone in my hometown has a maid, and no one other than my mother ever did the cleaning, cooking, and washing for me. At first I felt I could look after myself! Slowly I learned how time-consuming it is to shop with no supermarkets, to cook and bake without ovens, to launder clothes without washing machines—and became more and more grateful for all that Marietta did to help us. I'm sure I would wrench my back if

skating floors was left to me!

Standards of dressing are different here too. My wardrobe at home consisted of a few casual outfits, but here I feel shabby beside my smartly-dressed teachers and neighbors. I'm still not sure whether it is more acceptable for me to try to walk in high-heeled, fashionable shoes and tower over Filipino friends or to wear my comfortable but well-worn sandals. I know which I prefer, but what impression does that give?

Health Standards. Everyone prefers being strong and healthy to being sick, but new missionaries struggle to find the right balance between rudely refusing to try new foods and bravely tasting everything that is offered (only to discover that our foreign stomachs can't handle so many new things all at once!). Papaya tasted like soap the very first time I ate it, and just when I'd eaten enough mangoes to decide they were delicious my face broke out in red blotches. Imagine the tragedy of being allergic to mangoes! Now I look forward to all the tasty fruits and vegetables each season brings, but in the first months here I dreamed of apples and cherries, and cheese!

I praise the Lord for giving me a strong body which hasn't suffered from major or even many minor illnesses, but I do remember being frightened after visiting a hospitalized friend, wondering how I would manage if I were in the hospital myself. I was uneasy about trusting any doctor other than the one who had treated all of our family for many years.

Cultural Cues. As well as reacting negatively to constant staring, most of us in the provinces are upset at being addressed as "Joe"! I guess the name is a carry-over from army days when all GIs were called "Joe," but I wonder why the name persists. It is hard enough for those born outside the USA to accept being referred to as "Americanos," but for both men and women to be addressed as "Joe" takes even more adjustment. I suppose we find it unpleasant because it calls attention to the fact that we are different and still very conspicuous.

Having people shout, "Where are you going?" surprises newcomers because it seems a very personal question for strangers to ask. I've smiled as newer missionaries comment on the "nosy" Filipinos. But soon they learn, as I did, that a whole variety of questions are nothing more than friendly greetings similar to our "How are you?" which can be politely answered "Fine," no

matter how we really feel.

Being a *dalaga*, the question that arises in every conversation with a stranger is, "Would you marry a Filipino?" Because I was asked so often I tended to answer flippantly until the Lord taught me that another more important question lay behind the one about my preferences in a marriage partner. The hidden question is "Do you accept us as your equals or do you consider yourself superior to Filipinos?" To the question of acceptance I can truthfully answer, "Yes." It would be a privilege to be married to a Filipino, if that is what God has planned for my life.

The sense of privilege and gratitude to God for sending me here is heightened by the warmth and friendliness of Filipinos. Besides the generous hospitality and friendly smiles, I've been struck over and over again by the readiness of Filipinos to offer encouragement. When I was stumbling through my first few sentences of Tagalog, it was a tremendous boost to my confidence to be told I was doing well. We all need praise, affirmation and encouragement and I'm grateful for all I have learned from Filipino friends in this respect.

I've been told that over half of our communication with one another is nonverbal. If this is an accurate estimate it accounts for much of the confusion and even fear that result in situations where nonverbal cues are either not noticed or misinterpreted. In some cases we simply have different cues to express the same thing. One obvious example is in the way we indicate an affirmative response to a question. Before I could pronounce the word "Yes" I knew that nodding my head communicated that idea, but every Filipino child has learned that raised eyebrows indicate the same thing. Neither cue is more correct than the other, but the nonverbal ones take far longer for an adult foreigner to learn. I'm convinced that most of the misunderstandings I have with Filipino friends would be resolved if I were better at reading "body language." But in the meantime fear, uncertainty, and insecurity often result from not knowing what is meant in a given situation or what I'm expected to do to verify what I say.

Language Learning. I've seen the blank look on many new missionaries' faces as they try to translate sentences which have no written verb or clue as to the gender of a pronoun. "Mataba siya" could mean he or she is or was or will be fat or healthy or just right! Now do you see why we are puzzled?! Perhaps harder

to deal with than the structural and grammatical differences in language is the fact that we arrive looking like adults but with the language ability of a child who can't yet form intelligible words. We can mimic and memorize sounds, but only gradually do we learn what these sounds mean. For months we are limited in conversation to what we have been taught to say, unable to explore topics which interest us or to communicate how we feel. Because most Filipinos begin learning English in school and many know several regional dialects, it may be hard (for them) to appreciate how we feel arriving in the Philippines not knowing a single word of Tagalog. I've watched some new missionaries suffer from such a paralyzing fear of not being able to learn the language that they dread being with Filipinos. Even when the first faltering steps in communicating have been taken, we can still despair of ever becoming fluent. Sometimes we even resent the ease with which more experienced fellow missionaries can speak.

If some of these reactions don't sound very "Christian" perhaps reading this will help you to realize that leaving one's homeland and going out as a missionary doesn't turn a sinner into a saint! We all struggle with attitudes we see in ourselves and wish weren't there. And for most of us, living through so many changes is an unsettling, uncomfortably revealing experience. In our particular mission adjusting to fellow missionaries of various nationalities and denominations can involve more culture shock than adjusting to the Philippines! One of the ways the pressure surfaces is in waves of homesickness. Spending all of our free time writing letters home, treating the arrival of mail as the highlight of our day, or incessantly comparing life here with life "back home" are all ways homesickness can manifest itself. I'm no more immune to this disease than anyone else, but I was greatly helped when the Lord showed me that I was using homesickness as a nice-sounding word for what He saw as the sin of self-pity. When I realized I was sinning, I asked God's forgiveness and help in fighting my own weakness.

What is the key to passing quickly and completely through the confusion stage? Isn't it building meaningful, lasting relationships with Filipinos as well as with fellow missionaries? I'll never forget the Saturday outing with a group of young people from Bauan when I spent at least two hours floating in the sea and

chatting with one of the girls. I can't recall all of our conversation, but the seeds of mutual love and acceptance were sown that day and today I count Lerma as one of my closest friends.

I'm sure that our positive reactions to a new culture are in direct proportion to the amount we become involved in the lives of people. There have been occasions when I've spent a whole week in a frantic flurry of activity which allowed little time for interacting with Filipinos—and by Friday I've felt like a stranger here. It's at those times that negative thoughts and vague generalizations about life here come to mind. But a day spent visiting with Filipino friends—working, praying, problem-solving, or just joking together—leaves me thanking God for letting me be in the Philippines. Involvement leads to identification and I long for the day when I am addressed more frequently with *tayo* than *kayo*.

Perhaps phase three has no end. It's a time during which our surroundings become less threatening and relationships deepen. We can accept that the way things are done here is the best way given this particular set of circumstances. We're less wrapped up in appreciating other people's points of view. We are still sifting experiences and seeking to distinguish between reality and appearance but our outlook becomes more positive as we begin to see below the surface. Once we understand *why* people and things are as they are, it is much easier to acknowledge, then accept and finally adapt.

For instance, a friend was telling me recently that two years ago when he attended a large national conference for the first time, he was amazed at the amount of money "wasted" on promotional expenses (briefcases for each delegate with the name of the organization printed on the side, large banners, etc.) when he knew funds were short. But now he realizes how much these promotional materials engender a strong team spirit, raise the morale of the group and create a sense of pride in being part of a fine, prestigious organization.

Another example was my reaction to hearing that a girl of 15 and a boy of 16 in my church here were planning to be married in two weeks. From my western perspective they were too young, too inexperienced, and too unprepared for the responsibilities of marriage. But no one else seemed as perturbed as I was and the couple is now happily settled and growing together in the Lord. I was being confronted with thought-patterns and customs which were new to me, and initially dealt with them by assuming

that what was happening was "wrong." I'm learning that in many cases an action I consider wrong just reflects culturally different priorities and values. Isn't it good that as Christians we have a point of reference in the Word of God by which all of our values can be tested? We can keep all cultural values which reflect God's standards and reject those which divide the body of Christ.

Here, as elsewhere in the world, we are faced with instances of dishonesty and cheating. Sometimes I have thought someone was lying to me, or not keeping a promise, when actually they had made it perfectly clear (to any Filipino!) nonverbally just exactly what they meant. My ignorance again led me to the wrong conclusions. But because I still have much to learn in this area I still find it difficult to ascertain the truth in delicate situations. And often I destroy good rapport with Filipino friends by disagreeing with them on some minor issue or arguing over details which could easily be worked out at a later, more appropriate time. Oh, for the ability to maintain good *pakiki-sama!*

I've spoken from my own perspective, that of a dalaga who is quite free to adapt to Filipino foods and life-style. Think how many more things a married couple has to consider as they take into account their children's welfare and future as well as their own. Should they retain their own national table manners, language, disciplinary practices, etc., for the sake of their children even at the risk of offending Filipino believers? Yet ultimately I think it is the *inward* changes that matter most and lead to our being accepted here, not the external modifications in life-style. Each of us must ask ourselves the searching questions, "What matters most to me? How much *am I willing* to change?" Am I prepared to go to the altar, as did Abraham, and lay on it all the things which are important to me—my preferences, tastes, habits, values, my rights? May God help each of us, Filipino and American alike, to reach and remain at the place where we can say, "Lord, Thy will be done." As we submit to the lordship of Christ our King and are conformed to His image, may we see one another through His eyes.

7

TOURIST? EXPATRIATE? OR INCARNATE?: CHOOSE ONE

Miriam Adeney

Coping and Bonding: Is It Theologically Valid to Adapt to Philippine Values?

"Lord," Jojo began, "we thank You so much for sending Ron and Linda to us . . ."

While the bamboo trees creaked like doors on rusty hinges, nineteen Filipinos and three foreigners sat around a large open shed, praying. Tonight we were concentrating on one another's needs. ". . . for their careful Bible teaching. Their beautiful personal lives. Their warm home. Their enthusiasm and energy in serving You." Ron and Linda and I were the only foreigners on the staff. "And now, Lord," Jojo continued, "we beg You to deliver them from tensions . . ."

I was a little surprised. Tension? In their capable, efficient ministry? Well, yes, I suppose I had seen them tense, when they were weak from hepatitis, tired of wading around dead rats floating through the flooded market, charged full of adrenalin for a dozen meetings crammed into the week ahead and then let down when people forgot to show up for a crucial planning session. Yes, maybe they could relax a little more.

A gecko swiveled down the roofbeam. The prayers murmured on. Then I heard Arturo praying for me.

". . . and, our Father, we ask You to deliver her from tension . . ."

Tension—again! What was this all about? Were we foreigners

so much more tense than everybody else?

As a matter of fact—yes. We liked efficiency. So sometimes we got uptight about lagging schedules, while the Filipinos adjusted calmly to a land where natural or political typhoons could demolish any system. As a result, peace characterized pagan Filipinos more than it did many of us missionaries.

This was rather discouraging. Hadn't we been sent out to teach them a better life? And now we were discovering that here the recipients of our generosity were superior to us. People on the mission field were in some ways more Christ-like than the missionaries.

What an un-American discovery. After all, don't we assume (maybe unconsciously) that our culture is superior? We led the struggle toward a democratic form of government. We pioneered in science and technology. We, Westerners, gave modern medicine to the rest of the world.

And all these great undertaking have been enriched by our Christian heritage. Our democracy began with the belief that "all men . . . are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Science and technology blossomed in Europe because men believed this world was the creation of an orderly God. Modern health care and education spread to isolated cultures through Western Christians. Doesn't all this give us some right to see our culture as the best? What does God think about different cultures? Isn't there really one best life-style if we follow the Bible?

Certainly Christianity changes culture. It was a missionary, David Livingstone, who first aroused Englishmen against slavery, for example. It was a Christian, William Wilberforce, who organized a Christian lobby that led to the abolition of slavery in England. It was "evangelical public opinion, working through the English delegate to the Congress of Vienna in 1815, (that) was able to bring about the outlawing of the slave trade by most European states," according to historian Earl Cairns. In America, Christian abolitionists helped bring an end to slavery.

But, even with the good points brought about in part by the influence of Christian teaching, has Western culture "arrived" at a point where it can look down on other cultures?

When I looked around at my Filipino neighbors, for example, I saw strong families. Warm hospitality. Lots of time lavished on children. Enduring loyalties. The ability to live graciously on

little money. A heritage of economic freedom for women. Creativity in music. Sauces that deliciously extended a little meat to many people. A delight in sharing. Skill in the art of relaxation. Lithe, limber bodies. The ability to enjoy being with a large number of people continuously.

Since every good gift is from above and since all wisdom and knowledge come from Jesus Christ, these beautiful qualities of Philippine culture must be gifts of God. It seems that, just as our Creator delights in a vast variety of colors and smells, just as He has brought millions of unique personalities into being, so He has ordained an amazingly wide spectrum of cultures. He has programmed into man a capacity for cultural variation that enables us to explore our potential in all its complexity, to increase the richness of His world.

The early Christians accepted different cultures. When they preached to Jews, their framework was the law of Moses and the prophets. But when their audience was pagan, they dropped that emphasis and talked instead about how God provides for our physical and spiritual needs, and how God is stronger than idols. Peter learned to accept all peoples, including their food that was repulsive to him. Paul learned to be "all things to all men." Timothy was circumcised; Titus wasn't. Both were Paul's key men. The Epistles show that churches from different cultural backgrounds had different kinds of problems. So when the mother church in Jerusalem set standards, she decided not to ask new Christians in other cultures to conform to her ways, since there was "no difference between us and them" (Acts 15:9).

But in spite of biblical examples, we white American Christians have lagged behind in acknowledging that different life-styles may be equally acceptable to God. We don't consider ourselves prejudiced. But in fact, we often don't even recognize the existence of other life-styles until forced to—until dozens of Blacks or Jews or Chicanos confront us in the neighborhood or school or until an overseas trip brings us into contact with incomprehensibly backward natives. We may pride ourselves in having Filipino friends—so long as they've adapted to our American style of communicating. It's great to have friends whose ethnicity extend just far enough to be interesting, to give us a chance to try unusual dishes and exotic music. But if ethnicity extends much further—to different ambitions, political goals, moral values, family patterns, spending habits, language—how

many of us can maintain empathy? People who are that different confuse us. So we tend to use them when we need them but otherwise leave them alone. They function as a part of our environment rather than as fellow human beings.

In particular, we can't easily envision poor people's having a valid way of life. To be poor is wrong. It indicates failure. So when we encounter the majority of Filipinos who are poor (by our standards), we see mostly their economic problems or a few stereotype traits, rather than their cultural richness. We may even magnify their problems by ignoring their culture's redeeming features.

What a loss! Learning to accept people of another ethnic group may be somewhat scary. But it is also invigorating. It adds freshness (and who doesn't get stale sometimes?). In fact, our ethnic strengths can be mutually complementary. Maybe that's the way God intended it. The anthropologist Eugene Nida has suggested that even churches from different cultures may balance each other.

A friend of mine spent a summer in the Philippines sharing his American Christian strengths. In return, Filipino Christians shared theirs. He became newly aware of this on the way home, when, passing through Hawaii, he saw a girl in a bikini and wanted to laugh. He suddenly realized how Philippine Christian girls had taught him the loveliness of modesty.

Have you ever thought about how the cultural distinctives of Filipino Christians might enrich you?

Of course, Philippine values need to be judged. They need to be critiqued. Like Americans, Filipinos are not only created in the image of God; they are also sinners. The culture they've developed not only contains gifts of God's common grace in patterns of beauty and truth; it also contains patterns of institutionalized selfishness and exploitation. What, then, should a Christian attitude be to Philippine culture? A dynamic balance: We affirm *and* we confront.

We began this section with the question: *Is it theologically valid to adapt to Philippine values?* Indeed it is. When we are in the Philippines, we adapt and judge as does any sensible Filipino, especially a Spirit-filled Filipino. Of course we will carry some aspects of our American background with us. We need not lose sleep over this. As well, God may guide each of us to contrasting areas of adaptation. Nevertheless, when we live in the

Philippines, we should learn to operate from a Philippine value base, rather than an American value base. Our reference point should be local, not "back home." If we travel back and forth, we should aim to become bicultural, able to shift from one set of cultural priorities to another—as do many Filipinos who travel.

In the words of E. Thomas Brewster, we aim to "bond" with Filipino people. Their way of life is (in part) a result of God's gift of creativity to them. Their culture is a fit vessel for worship and service. We affirm this. Brewster gives four specific recommendations to facilitate bonding. To these I have added seven more. We need not be in bondage to these criteria. God may lead each of us a little differently, for good reasons. Yet these criteria constitute a useful checklist on which we do well to reflect.

Bonding Checklist

1. Be willing to live with a local family.
2. Limit all personal belongings to 20 kilos when you enter the country. Buy the rest locally.
3. Use only local public transportation.
4. Learn the language in the context of community relationships that you yourself develop and maintain.
5. Cultivate a strong sense of identity with the culture's values.
6. Find your closest field of friends from among members of the culture.
7. Receive regular spiritual nurture and direction from Christians in the culture.
8. Live simply, aware of local judgments on specific American material goods.
9. Get your news information from local media.
10. Cultivate local conversation styles, humor, and recreations.

This stretching is not easy. There are painful parts, just as there are in training for any sport. Several available books and articles describe culture shock. We will add here some principles for coping with the shock of a new culture and the pain of adjustment.

Principles for Coping with a New Culture

1. Accept culture stress.

2. Take time to maintain physical, emotional, and spiritual health.
3. Escape now and then—through relaxation or creative hobbies.
4. Know and accept yourself, your strengths and your limits. "Those who cross the seas may change the skies above, but not their own souls." (Horace)
5. Accept your emotions. Keep honest account with yourself.
6. Forgive yourself and others. Don't let grudges fester.
7. Enjoy learning.
   "Joy cares only for temples building, not at all for temples built." (C. S. Lewis)
8. Find out how the local people enjoy life, and do the same.
9. Cultivate a sense of humor.
10. Pour out your feelings in a journal or in letters.
11. Expect your prayer life to deepen.

Should we live like tourists? Should we live like expatriates? Or should we to a significant degree become incarnate in Philippine culture? All of these logistical suggestions are put forward so that we may more effectively model ourselves after the One who took on our form and lived among us to the end that people might see God's glory, full of grace and truth.

POSTSCRIPT

THEOLOGY, CONTEXT AND THE FILIPINO CHURCH

THEOLOGY, CONTEXT AND THE FILIPINO CHURCH

Melba Padilla Maggay

Students in a theological college in South Africa were given this question in an examination:

You are talking to an old man who is a follower of traditional religion. Explain to him why Christians believe in God, and what they believe about Him.

In one answer the hand was the hand of Africa but the voice was that of Europe: I would say to him, "There are five arguments for the existence of God: the cosmological argument, the ontological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument and the argument *ex consensu gentium.*" *(Donald Arden, Out of Africa, Something New)*

The above example demonstrates the bizarre results of implanting a theological tradition alien to the culture of a people.

The domination of western theological formulations has led to a situation where in order to speak to their people, Christians in Asia and Africa are taught to answer questions raised by Greek sophists in 4th century AD.

Filipinos who live in a culture still awed by the Power that can be clearly perceived in things that have been made, are taught to start from the supposition that we are talking to post-Christians long past the age of the mythical and, therefore, must belabor the existence of a supernatural God. We defend the Scripture as if we speak to the scientific rationalist, and not to people who have yet to see nature "demythologized," stripped of the wondrous and the magical.

In a society overwhelmed by poverty and injustice and

pressed by the constant threat of political instability, we learn to preoccupy ourselves with trivial theological controversies and such fine points as to whether some scandalously miraculous gifts have ceased and whether in baptizing we ought to dunk or daintily pour.

Minds that would normally think in concrete wholes are painfully trained to make abstract distinctions between faith and works, Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Savior, the sphere of the "secular" and the spheres of the "holy."

Unable to cope with the fact that men are predestined to be saved and the same time many freely will to damn themselves, western theological traditions insist in presenting the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man as problematic, and this to an oriental people happily able to live with the engaging perplexities of a paradox.

In a culture which puts a great deal of emphasis on interrelatedness, the offer of salvation continues to be cast in highly individualistic terms. Salvation is advertised as a purely private entrance into an other-wordly kingdom. The formula is to receive Jesus as "personal" Lord and Savior, as if He were merely one's own and no one else's, and as if the act concerned no one else but oneself. An act of commitment is thought to be more genuine if made against a backdrop of family hostility than if it were made against the more congenial environment of consensus. The call for repentance remains highly personal and pietistic, having to do almost exclusively with a beating of the breast over one's sins, and very rarely with one's participation in the collective guilt of unjust structures. Discipleship has been narrowed to evangelism and singing hymns to Jesus, completely divorced from the witness demands of the larger community. God is said to be more deeply experienced in the rarefied heights of solitude, not in the warm and earthy explosion of togetherness. In effect, conversion in our culture has often meant a retreat into further isolation, not a flinging of arms wide open to meet the desolation of the world.

Because the Filipino evangelical church is for the most part a creature made in the pale image of the American Bible belt, it has remained alienated from the surrounding culture. Instead of being scattered again in a deeper way among his people, a convert goes through a kind of cultural circumcision: he renounces an inherited culture of symbol in favor of a more barren intellec-

tualism in faith and worship; he learns to sing of summer and winter, springtime and harvest; quite unconsciously, he borrows the tastes and scruples of the missionary's Puritan conscience in matters of dress and lifestyle. If in the past he has burned deeply over the poverty of his people, he learns to temper his political opinions in a way that ceases to be offensive to the sedate politics of people raised in the soporific opulence of Middle America.

The result of all these is a continuing failure to speak to our people's needs, to discern the prophetic Word, God's message to this particular culture at this particular time.

Theology Relativized

It seems that at the heart of the failure to situate the Gospel adequately within the context of people is the failure to perceive that we have a faith *delivered*, not *interpreted*, once for all.

The faith of the Apostles has been infallibly set down for our instruction. But insight into this faith has been and continues to be a struggle, a wrestling of the clear Word through the darker glass of time and circumstance.

It has been said that there is no such thing as the indigenization of theology. If we are talking of the same God, then it must be the same knowledge in all cultures.

This fails to take into account the cultural conditioning of our statements about the one God revealed in the Scriptures. There are no "unengaged" readings of Scripture. The exigencies of a particular situation largely control the shape of our interpretations.

For instance, the stress in justification by faith as a legal abstraction has been attributed to Luther's tortured need to be sure that he was saved apart from the rigorous discipline of monastic life. It was natural in the light of what has been called the "introspective and guilt-ridden conscience of the West" that this doctrine should receive a great deal of emphasis at a time when the early Jew-Gentile crisis had faded, "where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man's salvation." (Krister Stendhal, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West") Likewise, the problem of poverty and oppression in Latin

America has eventually produced a theology preoccupied with the motif of liberation. "Even 20th century Protestant evangelicalism with its firm maintenance of the Paul-Augustine-Luther-Calvin axis is more closely linked to the structure of Aristotelian philosophy and Thomist natural theology than many of its adherents care to admit." (Robin Boyd, *The Philosophical Context of Indian Christian Theology*)

While there has been a tendency in recent years to stress the exigencies of a context at the expense of what is obviously given in the text, the history of theological traditions tells us that it is context which serves as the hermeneutical principle in interpreting the Gospel. The world, in a sense, "sets the agenda." Those who hear in this the ring of relativism and captivity to context have only to exercise some degree of "hermeneutical suspicion" to realize that our sociohistorical situations determine the selection of central motifs in the formulation of theologies.

This means that our statements about the Absolute Reality given in Scripture are bound to be limited by the specific structure of the reality that is known to us. Men have no eyes but for those aspects of things which they have been taught to discern, says the psychologist William James. The things we commonly see are those that have been labeled for us. We perceive selectively. And so a culture, because of the peculiarity of its needs and circumstances, may be more sensitive to some insight which may be partially hidden or entirely lost on another.

It is understandable, for instance, that the Jews of Jesus' day, smarting under the yoke of Roman rule, should pin their hopes on the glorious Messiah of Isaiah 11, and fail to see Him as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The New Testament talks a great deal of the "power encounter" between Jesus and the spirits, but this has largely escaped the notice of countries dominated by the scientific outlook. Animistic cultures, in contrast, are struck in a powerful way by this liberating aspect of the Gospel.

Herein lies the difficulty of knowing the "essence" of the Gospel. Theologians speak of a "core" which is non-negotiable and supracultural. If our perceptions are culture bound, how do we arrive at a definition of the "essentials," the universal elements which must always be present if the Gospel is to be preached adequately in any given culture? How do we separate the "essence" from the "accidents" of culture?

Obviously, what one culture perceives as the "barest essen-

tials" would differ from what another culture would consider as an important focus. To the West, the elements surrounding the concept of sin and guilt have for years comprised an acceptable minimum. It was only after the advent of radicalism and the awakening of the church to the problems of the Third World that this was shown to be sadly inadequate. Latin Americans deem as unacceptable a gospel that falls short of articulating the economic consequences of a thoroughgoing discipleship. Asian and Africans who expect that anyone speaking of God will automatically concern himself with healing and exorcism tend to see release from demonic oppression and bodily decay as central to the saving message of the Gospel.

It is clear from this that there is not a single theology or formulation which may unabashedly advertise itself as universal enough to cover all of Scripture, or be capable of ready transplantation into another culture. The richness of the Gospel story is such that no summary may be said to have "captured" the message in its "essence" or entirety; the Bible itself presents four versions of the story. To abstract a "core" of selected propositions and put it forward as *the* Gospel is reductionist: a Greek rather than Hebrew practice of approaching the "whole Gospel." We would do better biblically to recognize that existing formulations are but functional summaries of a particular cultural context.

The Word Made Flesh

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

How has the Father sent the Son? How has He made himself known?

The answer, quite simply, was to become like us. God in speaking to the human condition exposed Himself to the scandal of particularity; the Eternal and the Invisible was made flesh, given a body, a time and a place. He dwelt in the world His hands had made, took upon Himself a determinate origin, a history, a culture, and a family. In Jesus, we see God in human context: walking the dusty streets of Jerusalem, hobnobbing with the grimy, sweaty people of the marketplace, eating and drinking and trying to make ends meet with the tools of his trade.

The God of the Universe was a Jew. He was of the tribe of

Judah, was circumcised, fasted and prayed and went to the synagogue and ritually kept the great national festivals. The transcendent, supracultural God circumscribed Himself, daringly and in a mind-boggling way, within the bald specificity of Jewish culture.

At the heart of the effort to root the Gospel in the soil of culture is the desire to imitate the Father's sending.

The Church is to go out, into the heart of the world, and there "make flesh" the Word. She must "sit where the people sit," participate in their life in a way that touches the raw centers of their needs and fears.

The Incarnation means that the Word must have a body; a community that shall make visible the startling newness of life that Jesus brings. It also means that we must empty ourselves, lay aside the sometimes numbing privilege of being in the know, step down from the glory of our cliches and the splendor of our common places, and learn to eat of the common bread, teach our eyes to see as the world sees and our tongues to speak as the world speaks.

For so long, the gospel has been wrapped in a veil of abstraction, a string of ethereal propositions delivered from the heights of a pie-in-the-sky piety, far above the foul and needy world of men. While there is a historical uniqueness to the Incarnation, we must, like Jesus, breathe the stronger air of the world below, and immerse ourselves in the warm and bracing task of living among men. Anything less than this hides the God who has revealed Himself, fully and plainly, in the stark humanity of the Son.

The Task Before Us

For many centuries, the Spirit has illumined the churches of the West as they struggled to verbalize to themselves the unerring Word in the face of accretions and distortions brought about by tradition and cultural consensus. The resulting creeds and formulations form a valuable part of the heritage of the Church the world over.

These may not substitute, however, for the work of discerning what the Spirit says to the rest of the churches in other parts of this world.

Before us is the problem of defining at what precise point the

Word may be made to cut and heal in our cultural situation. How are we to deal with the many cases of demonic captivity, slavery to magic rituals, devotion to miraculous images? How do we make sin and guilt intelligible to a culture whose conscience is highly socialized and at the same time sensitive to ruptures in nature and disturbances in the cosmos? How are we to view the millions of our poor? What is our response to organized injustice? In what terms are we to preach discipleship? What is the specific content of the Gospel in our own context?

These are questions that need to be answered if we are to wrestle truly with the demonic at its point of greatest power in our culture. There is need to break out of thought forms and formulations that do not really speak to the needs of our people. Failure to do this condemns the Filipino Church to a continuing history of incoherence. We run the risk of going on unheeded, mumbling in corners about the meaning of our own symbols.

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